

BOWLING HEIGHTS
3610 Old Crain Highway
Upper Marlboro
Prince Georges County
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-984

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PHOTOGRAPHS AND
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BOWLING HEIGHTS

HABS NO. MD-984

Location: 3610 Old Crain Highway, Upper Marlboro, Prince George's County, Maryland

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. John Myers (also present occupant)

Present Use: Private residence and horse farm

Significance: Bowling Heights is an excellent example of a high-style Victorian-era residence, exhibiting elements of Gothic Revival and Stick style design. Bowling Heights, and its twin Villa de Sales in Aquasco, are the largest and most fully expressed examples of this style in Prince George's County. Its detailing, both inside and out, is among the finest in the county. Also of interest is the chapel attached to the main house. This is an unusual remnant of the private chapels which were seen in a number of wealthier homes in Prince George's County during the era of Catholic persecution during the 18th century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Bowling Heights was constructed ca. 1877. A pencil inscription was revealed when brass hardware was removed from a door which reads, "George N. Ellis, carpenter, Baltimore, 1877." Its twin, Villa de Sales, built by Bowling's sister and brother-in-law in Aquasco, is documented by letters from the sister to her lawyer as having been built in 1877. Also, 1877 corresponds with the date that John Bowling purchased the property from Henry W. Clagett (deed HB 12:542).

2. Architect: The architect is unknown. Family tradition has it that both Bowling Heights and Villa de Sales were built by the same architect. Its grand style would suggest an architect and/or pattern book design.

3. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1877 Deed HB #12:542, 10 September 1877
 Henry W. Clagett
 To
 John Bowling
 Part of a tract of land known as
 "Tallequah"... situated near the town of Upper
 Marlboro... adjoining the lands of Richard S.
 Hill, the estate of Mordecai S. Plummer and
 the lands of the said Henry Clagett.
- 1887 Will, WJA 1:460 (copy in Equity #4900)
 John Bowling
 To
 "... my beloved wife, Jemima Christiana
 Bowling shall have and hold all of my estate
 both real and personal... to apply the
 proceeds thereof to the support of herself and
 the support and education of our children...
 John Dominic, Susan Elizabeth and Hellen
 Loretta..."
- 1917 Deed 124:460, 2 July 1917
 Jemima C. Bowling, widow (of John Bowling), et
 al
 To
 George Swanson
 Whereas in Equity #4900, Jemima C. Bowling et
 al vs. George Swanson, John Dominick Bowling
 and M. Hampton Magruder were appointed
 trustees to sell the real estate, a tract
 known as lot #1 of "Spring Hill" farm, 453
 acres, 3 roods; and 42-1/2 acres being HB
 12:542.
- 1919 Administration #3022
 George Swanson, of Prince George's County,
 deceased 13 March 1919, Last Will & Testament,
 all property real and personal...
 To
 Elizabeth Swanson, wife
- 1961 Deed 2623:377, 1 December 1961
 William G. Swanson & Dorothy M. Swanson, his
 wife; and Donald Swanson, Jr. and Claudette
 Swanson, his wife
 To
 John Marlow Myers
 Lot #2 of "Bowling Heights", 149.11 acres as

per plat made by Millard Thorne, surveyor 17
May 1926, plat book RNR 2:89.

4. Builder, contractor, supplier: Bowling Heights may have been constructed by carpenter George N. Ellis of Baltimore whose name is inscribed in pencil on one of the doors.

5. Original plans and construction: No original plans have been found. The house is believed to have been built all at once, the wing at one end and the chapel at the other being contemporary to the main block.

6. Alterations and additions: The one-and-a-half story wing to the south was originally a kitchen, pantry and servants quarters and has since been changed into an office (where the original kitchen was) and new kitchen (where the original pantry was). The current owner, Mr. John Myers, added a bath on the second floor where there had previously been a closet and doorway connecting the two north side bedrooms. Interior moldings and fixtures have been removed from the chapel which had been remodeled into a kitchen at one time, and sections of the ceiling molding had to be removed when a drop ceiling was installed (since removed). The fireplace in the dining room had to be closed in order to allow for a modern heating system.

B. Historical Context:

Bowling Heights is among the finest post-bellum farm residences in Prince George's County, and therefore reflects the renewed prosperity of the post Civil War era. Prior the Civil War the county was divided into large tobacco plantations, creating a stratified society where the majority of wealth was held by a small but powerful planter class. By 1860, Prince George's County was at the height of its development, producing thirteen million pounds of tobacco, more than twice that of its neighboring counties.

The Civil War, however, ended a long chapter in the history of Prince George's, bring a close to the plantation system on which the economy had been based. Large plantations were gradually broken up, creating smaller farms (in 1870, there were approximately 800 farms and by 1900 this number had grown to 2,400). Likewise, agricultural production suffered in the

aftermath of the war. Thirteen million pounds of tobacco in 1860 dropped to less than four million in 1870. Prosperity was slowly renewed, however, as Prince Georgians adapted to a farm rather than a plantation economy, and became more diversified in their farm products (though tobacco remained the most important crop, truck farming grew). It was during this period of renewed prosperity--of recovery from the devastating effects of the Civil War--that Bowling Heights was constructed. Thus, it reflects the prosperity of the second phase in the agricultural history of Prince George's County.

John Bowling, the builder of Bowling Heights, was among the new breed of wealthy planter in Prince George's County. According to Hopkins Atlas of 1878, J. Bowling owned 1800 acres in the third or Upper Marlboro district, at that time the largest land holding listed in the district. Originally from Aquasco--located in the southern part of the county--Bowling came from a well-to-do family. His father, John Dominic Bowling, was a wealthy planter. Upon his death in 1874 he left an estate assessed at \$155,008 (Tax Assessments, 1868, Md. Archives #11054).

John M. Bowling married Jemima C. Plummer (Mittie) on December 15, 1868. She was the daughter of Mordecai Plummer. According to Effie G. Bowie, "Mr. Mordecai Plummer was a man of wealth and had married a daughter of 'Mount Pleasant,' Susan Waring. Mittie Plummer, the one daughter of the couple, was... a real belle and endowed with beauty and wealth. She married when little more than a girl, John Bowling, son of Col. Dominic Bowling of Woodville. They built the home known today as 'Bowling Heights' near Marlboro...." (Bowie, p. 16). Mordecai died in 1873 leaving a large estate. To his only daughter, Jemima C. Bowling, he left "that portion of my real estate lying adjacent and next to the lands of Benjamin T. Hodges, Richard S. Hill and the Mount Pleasant estate (his dwelling), as the fence now stands" (Bowie, p. 580). Jemima's inheritance amounted to 453 acres of "Spring Hill" farm.

Then in September of 1877, John Bowling purchased the 42.5 acres of the "Tallequah" property--adjoining his wife's inheritance--on which "Bowling Heights" was built from Henry W. Clagett (Deed HB 12:542). Mr. Clagett and John Bowling were business partners, trading as Bowling & Clagett. Clagett was also his wife's first cousin, and this parcel was part of property that had been in the

family (Waring and Plummer lines) for many years. Construction of Bowling Heights presumably began at this time. A clue as to the date of construction was discovered when brass hardware was removed from a door. Inscribed in pencil was "George N. Ellis, carpenter, Baltimore, 1877." At the same time John's sister, Fanny Bowling Forbes, was constructing a nearly identical residence, "Villa de Sales," in their home town of Aquasco (formerly, Woodville). According to family tradition both houses were designed by the same architect, though no record of this has been found. The elaborate ornamentation of both houses certainly suggests either an architect or pattern-book design.

John Bowling died in 1887 at the age of fifty, leaving his wife, Jemima Christiana Bowling, and their five children John Dominic, Susan Elizabeth, Helen Loretta, Christine, and Catherine Bowling. According to his will all his property went to his wife "including my dwelling house and lot of land on which it stands which I purchased of Henry W. Clagett..." (WJA 1:460, copy in Equity #4900). In addition to this property in Upper Marlboro, Bowling owned other farms in his hometown of Aquasco and in Queen Anne district which he left to his children.

Mrs. Bowling--then the wife of Harry E. Quinn--was forced to sell Bowling Heights in 1917, the proceeds from the farm being insufficient to cover the mortgage she had taken against the property. According to testimony by Attorney William G. Brooke during the equity proceedings, "The farm is now suffering and has been suffering for a long time under the system it is being worked, namely the tenant system..." The purchaser, George Swanson of Wisconsin, arranged to take immediate possession of the farm from the lessee, John D. Bowling, but did not require possession of the dwelling and twenty acres until the 1st of September 1919.

George Swanson, then of Prince George's County, died in March of 1919, before taking possession of the house. According to his will the Bowling Heights property was left to his wife, Elizabeth. It was later inherited by William and Donald Swanson who conveyed it to the current owner in December of 1961.

Bowling Heights was constructed during the height of the Victorian era, which is reflected in the high style ornamentation found both inside and out. It is probably best described as a Stick-style residence. Stick, a less

common style (executed roughly 1860-1890) was a transitional style linking the previous Gothic Revival with the later Queen Anne. Stick style architecture is characterized by its use of patterned wall surfaces such as siding applied in varying directions, corner boards and other framing elements, and embellished trusses. Gothic Revival is generally executed in masonry, whereas Stick is executed in wood frame. In fact, Stick is often characterized as the wood-frame version of high Victorian Gothic (McAlester, 256). In a county where a large portion of its grand residences are of Georgian vintage, examples of High Victorian Gothic are uncommon, and Bowling Heights is among the finest examples.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: As a residence executed in a richly ornamented interpretation of the High Victorian Gothic or Stick style, Bowling Heights embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type of architecture that was popular in urban areas in the 1870s, and rarely found in rural Maryland. The important exterior features of Bowling Heights include its complex, asymmetrical massing, its multiple-gable forms with elaborate scroll-sawn and stick-work ornamentation, its patterned-slate roof, and the use of recessed bays, applied horizontal board banding, and a variety of siding treatments to create a polychromatic appearance. On the interior, the pattern flooring, Eastlake stairway, heavy moldings and ornate ceiling medallions are notable.

2. Condition of fabric: Bowling Heights appears to be in very good condition with its historic fabric--interior and exterior detailing--intact.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Bowling Heights has a two-and-a-half story, five-bay wide, rectangular-shaped main block with a cross-gable, dormered roof covered with polychromatic slate. The west front facade has five evenly-spaced bays on the first story, the entry being the center bay. On the second story there is a recessed balcony to the center above the front entry. In the third story there is a cross-gable front with elaborate cross-bracing to the north side, a gable roof with

dormers to the south. The rear is a mirror image of the front. Porches run the length of the front and rear facades of the main block. At the south end of the main block is a one-and-a-half story, three-bay by two-bay, T-shaped wing, with wall dormers. The first two bays have a gable roof and form a hyphen-like connection to the steeply pitched hipped roof section to the far end. At the north end is a tall one story, octagonal-shaped chapel wing, also with wall dormers.

2. Foundations: The foundation is a combination of cut and rubble stone.

3. Walls: The walls are covered with german siding. They are framed by cornerboards and wooden beltcourses running above and below the windows on both stories. Also, under the overhang eaves is a wide board-and-batten frieze. This board-and-batten treatment also appears in the cross-gable ends of the front and rear facades of the main block. There is a wide, splayed board along the bottom of the wall, forming a water table.

4. Structural system, framing: Bowling Heights is of wood, presumably balloon, framing.

5. Porches, balconies: Elaborately detailed Gothic porches run the length of the front and rear facades of the main block. The porch supports form an embellished truss-like pattern with chamfered posts (paired at the center entryway with three at the corners) with punch and gouge work, and flat arches between the posts. The balustrade has wide cut-out panels between each post. There is a balcony on the second floor of the west front above the entry. It is recessed and has a cut-out balustrade and brackets forming a flat arch with trefoil cut-outs. At the rear of the south wing there is a plain, recessed porch. Near this is another small porch at the crux between the main block and the south wing, supported by two chamfered posts with the cut-out balustrade.

6. Chimneys: The house has five tall, thin brick exterior chimneys with decoratively recessed panels and corbelling. There are two at each end of the main block (the stack is missing from the northwest chimney), and one to the rear of the south wing. There is a wooden pent between the chimneys at the south end of the main block.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is to the center of the west facade. It has double doors with two deeply-recessed panels with molded edges. They are surrounded by chamfered pilasters--which match the porch posts--with a two-light transom and full, three-light sidelights (no corner lights). A plain frame surrounds the entire entryway. There is an entry to the center of the east rear facade as well. It, however, has a single door without ornamentation. There are two doorways to the east rear of the south wing, both with plain surrounds. There are two doorways in the octagon-shaped chapel wing, one to the west front and the other to the east rear, directly across from it. They have four-panel doors with glass in the two, taller top panels. Above the doors are three-part, pointed-arched etched transom windows in three colors. Above the transoms are false wall dormers which mimic those found elsewhere on the house.

b. Windows and shutters: The typical window is a large two-over-two-light, double-hung sash with plain board surrounds and louvered shutters. The first-story windows of the main block, however, are large floor-to-ceiling, two-over-four-light, double-hung sash. There are paired windows in the gable ends and in the larger dormers at the front and rear of the main block. In the east-end chapel wing the windowheads are pointed. There are false wall dormers in the chapel wing, above the pointed-arched transom windows.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Bowling Heights has an unusual roof which varies from section to section. The main block has a gable roof with cross gables at the west front, east rear and north side. The south side of the roof, however, is hipped, with dormers. The roof is covered with polychromatic slate using dark-colored square slates and lighter-colored hexagonal slates to form scalloped bands and a pattern of inverted triangles.

The south wing forms a T-shape with the center hyphen-like section having a gable roof with wall dormers. The end section has a steeply pitched hipped roof. Like the roof of the main block,

these are covered with polychromatic slate shingles. The chapel has a steeply pitched gable roof, octagonal at the end. Again, it is covered with polychromatic slate.

b. Cornice, eaves: The main block and the two side wings all have overhanging roofs which end in a V-shaped molding lined with small, scotia brackets. The cornice consists of a board-and-batten frieze. The three gable fronts (west front, east rear and north side) have decorative cross-bracing. The bracing has a center ridge-beam and diagonally crossing tie-beams. In the lower corners of the gable front is bracing forming a ninety-degree angle with scalloped barge-boards, supported by cut-out brackets.

c. Dormers: There are a number of highly ornamented dormers, both regular and wall dormers. The front and rear of the main block have two dormers each, one being a larger dormer with a paired window. There is also a dormer at each side of the main block. All have steep-pitched gable roofs with elaborate cross bracing and barge-boards supported by ornamental brackets. The windows are flanked with molded pilasters. There are wall-dormers in both wings, three each to the front and rear, and one at each end (they are smaller, false-dormers in the chapel wing, located above the transom windows). They are ornamented in the same manner as the others.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: The main block has a center hall plan with two rooms to either side. The center hall runs front to rear with the stairway along the south wall. A rear entry is located directly across from the front. To the north are two parlors, joined by a large doorway with pocket doors. Both rooms have fireplaces to the center of the north wall. To the east of the fireplace in the northwest room is a doorway into the chapel wing. This is a single room with cathedral ceilings. There are two exterior doorways, directly across from each other to the east and west.

On the other side of the center hall, the southwest room is the formal dining room and adjoining it to the rear is the southeast sitting room. These two rooms are also joined by pocket doors. The sitting room has a fireplace to the center of the south wall (a fireplace formerly in the dining room was block up for the furnace and the mantel removed). In the sitting room is a doorway into the new kitchen in the south wing. An exterior doorway is located at the east wall. There is a doorway at the west end of the south wall into the former kitchen, now used as an office. Between the two rooms of the wing is an enclosed stairway. There is a fireplace in the south room, east wall.

b. Second floor: The second floor follows the same layout with bedrooms over each of the four rooms in the first story of the main block. An added doorway to the center of the north wall leads to a bath, and a door to the center of the south wall, to a perpendicular hallway for the wing, with a back stair. To the west front, over the entry, is a small sewing room. This room was originally the nursery and still has glass panes in the door so that the baby can be viewed without being disturbed. The stairway continues up to the third floor.

c. Third floor: The third story is roughly finished with a center hall with four dormered rooms off of it. A built-in ladder in the hall leads to the attic space above.

2. Stairways: The main stairway is a heavy, elaborately carved Eastlake style, three-flight, open-well, closed-string stair. It along the south wall to a landing, turns and continues to a second landing, and then turns once more and continues to the second floor. From here it continues up to the third floor in the same manner. The balustrade is in dark wood with a heavy, square newel post with an incised floral design. It has an octagonal cone cap with a finial. There is a heavy molded handrail, and a balustrade consisting of short chamfered balusters resting on cut-out panels. The panels are framed by every other baluster which extend the full length to create a framework. A raised panel appears in the closed-string step ends, and the wall beneath it in the first flight is covered with vertical boards. The back stair--located in the south wing--is an enclosed single-run stair.

3. Flooring: There is hardwood flooring throughout the house. In the stairhall and the southwest room (dining room) the floors are alternating walnut and ash, giving a striped effect (recently refinished).

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings are of plaster. There are heavy molded cornices and elaborate plaster ceiling medallions in the center hall and all four rooms on the first floor of the main block. The medallion in the center hall is oblong-shaped and has a scrolling floral pattern with the inscription, "H. Berger 97 4th Ave., N.Y., Patent Aug 17 1860". The medallions in the adjoining northwest and northeast parlors are the same and feature the protruding plaster face of a Victorian woman repeated four times in a symmetrical, floral cartouche pattern. In the dining room the medallion is of fruits and vegetables intertwined, with a woven basket pattern to the center. The southeast sitting room has a medallion with scrolls and floral cartouche designs. There is a sixth ceiling medallion in the second-floor stairhall, a smaller version of the medallion in the first-floor stairhall. There are wide baseboards throughout.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: There is heavy, stepped architrave molding around the doorways on the first and second floors, and plain-board surrounds in the third. The doors have six molded panels with long top panels, small center panels and mid-sized lower panels.

b. Windows: The windows, like the doorways, are surrounded with stepped architrave molding. In the chapel are pointed-arched, stained-and-etched glass transom windows above the doorways, and one on the north end wall.

6. Decorative features and trim: There are three decorative marble mantels in the first story of the main block. They vary slightly but basically have a round-arched opening with a cartouche keystone with incised spandrels.

7. Hardware: All the doors have the original hardware consisting of elaborate floral and scroll patterns on the knobs and circular plates against the door and the keyholes. The hinges are plain. There is a decorative pull-knob for the front door bell. When pulled the knob

rings a bell mounted on the bottom of the interior door frame. The shutters are held or released by thumb latches.

8. Mechanical equipment: The original gas light fixtures are currently being stored in the house.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Bowling Heights sits atop a knoll, facing west. A long drive runs to the south side and circles around in front (or continues to the rear). The front yard area is dotted with numerous trees. To the south and rear of the house is the barnyard, with a number of outbuildings. Although in a private, country-like setting, Bowling Heights can be seen from Route 301, and the property borders on a new subdivision.

2. Historic landscape design: A circular drive in front of the house is still visible although overgrown. It was most likely at one time the formal entry for visitors to Bowling Heights, as there is a large stone near the front steps for dismounting a horse or carriage. The house fronts on Old Crain Highway, the old road to Upper Marlboro which preceded Route 301.

3. Outbuildings: There are a number of outbuildings, only two or three of which are original. These are located directly southeast of the house and include a square, cross gable roof dairy, and a pyramidal roof meat house. There is also a small shed. To the south is a large 20th-century, gambrel-roof barn, and a small horse stable which appears to have been converted from a corn crib. There is another large barn to the southeast and to the east is a long, low modern horse stable.

PART IV. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interviews: Discussions with the current owner, John Myers, were held on April 26th and September 14th, 1989.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

King, Marina (Prince George's County, HPC) Maryland Historical Trust/National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Villa de Sales,

prepared December 1987.

Pearl, Susan G. (Prince George's County HPC),
National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form, Bowling Heights,
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Prince George's County Land Records (deeds as cited
in the text).

Prince George's County Judgement Records (Equity
cases as cited in the text).

Prince George's County Register of Wills (Wills and
administrations as cited in text).

2. Secondary and published sources:

Hopkins, G.M. Atlas of Prince George's County,
Maryland (Washington, D.C.: 1878).

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. A Field Guide to
American Houses. New York: Alfred A. Knopf,
Inc., 1984.

Virta, Alan. Prince George's County; A Pictorial
History (Prince George's County, Maryland:
Donning Company/Publishers, 1984).

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of Bowling Heights was undertaken as part of a cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission on behalf of the Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission to document select historic sites throughout the county. The site selection was made by Gail Rothrock, director and Susan G. Pearl, research historian, of the HPC. They also provided access to their historical research and information on file with the HPC, as well as their extensive knowledge of the history of Prince George's County. The large format photography was undertaken by HABS photographer Jack E. Boucher. The historical report was prepared by HABS historian Catherine C. Lavoie, who also accompanied the photographer into the field for on site investigation (April and September 1989).